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## Note-perfect production is a delight

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By JOSIE BALFOUR

Patience King's Theatre

ANYONE who thinks that the cult of celebrity began with Princess Diana and Britney Spears may want to take a seat front row at the King's this week and check out Patience.

Back in the late-1800s – generations before the likes of Russell Brand and Pete Doherty – it was the poets of the aesthetic movement who held sway.

The rock stars of their day, these poets devoted their lives to beauty and the classic form, in the process coining the term "art for art's sake" and inspiring a trend for all things exquisite.

Parodying this Victorian fad with their own particular brand of sharp observational humour, Gilbert and Sullivan go to town in this tale of thwarted love and romantic ideals.

While Patience is one of the easiest of the Savoy Operas to place in a modern setting, exchanging Aestheticism for the Beat movement or even Hollywood stars, the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Edinburgh have chosen to remain true to the original intent of the play.

It's a decision that was not lost on the enchanted audience last night., who derived a great deal of joy from the faithful portrayal.

Indeed, the dedication of the performers, quality of music and set decoration firmly took the production out of the amateur dramatic and placed it firmly into the range of semi-professional.

Add to that the relatively cheap ticket cost and the show could easily give most of the professional operas that arrive in Edinburgh a good run for their money.

The company's proficient recital was assisted in no small part by Alan Borthwick, a director with a genuine appreciation of the intent behind the text and an excellent eye for comic timing and ensemble scenes.

Borthwick's own turn as the narcissistic Archibald Grosvenor is cheerfully mischievous, but his real skill lies in drawing out excellent performances from his co-stars.

While some of the cast lack the vocal strength and stamina of professional singers, they make up for any shortcomings with enthusiasm and an obvious affection for the music.

The women in the chorus were in fine fettle as the 20 fickle, heartsick maidens alternately pining for the love of Ian Lawson's deliciously devious Reginald Bunthorne and the soldiers they'd spurned for beauty; after all, how can one love a man whose uniform is in primary colours? Their classical poses were a highlight and Susan Horsburgh's lovelorn Lady Jane made the most of every comic opportunity on stage.

Enter the men, who, upon discovering that their women folk have been seduced by a man in a floppy hat, resolve to win them back by any means necessary.

Meanwhile, level-headed milkmaid Patience finds herself in a dilemma when she is advised that true love is always unselfish. Should she, then, marry the poet she loves and deprive the world of his beauty or the poet she despises, thus living unselfishly?

Though it's not a dilemma for modern women, it gave Debbie Wake the chance to shine as the perplexed heroine. Fortunately Patience is not beautiful, so it's acceptable for her poet suitors to love her unselfishly. What a pity, in our plastic surgery obsessed culture, that some things are harder to translate than others.

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